

**“Open Our Eyes: Love All the People”  
Matthew 10:40-42**

**A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells, using material provided by the UMC Discipleship Ministries<sup>1</sup>**

We’ve been talking about where to start in order to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world.

- We started with Jesus’ command to his 11 disciples to “go therefore” and make disciples; to baptize them, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; to teach them to keep the message of Jesus about loving God and loving others; and, to remember Jesus is always with us.
- We started where Jesus started, by seeing all the people, in all their beautiful imperfections, their needs, and their desires for something meaningful in life. And we found when we look long enough and hard enough, we see the selfsame needs and desires in ourselves.
- And we started by hearing all the people; hearing the cries of the distressed; knowing we’ve a story to tell to the nations about God’s love in Jesus Christ that saves us from our sins...that saves us from ourselves...but first, we listen to all the people.

See all the people, hear all the people... and now, today, we complete the series with the final piece of this three-piece movement: we love all the people. Where do we begin to love all the people? It begins with hospitality. That is the starting point for our text from the Gospel of Matthew:

“Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Matthew 10:40).

Jesus’ words here are interesting. The Gospel lesson is not about the hospitality **we** provide, but about the hospitality we **receive**. There’s a strong tradition of hospitality that lies behind this. Being hospitable and welcoming the stranger is highly valued in the Bible.

- Think about Abraham, for example, who saw three strangers (angels in disguise) passing along the road. He ran out to meet them, offered them food and drink, and for his troubles, Abraham and his wife Sarah were rewarded with a child in their old age—Isaac, the promised child of God’s covenant. (Genesis 18:1-15). Their courtesy was remembered by the writer of Hebrews: “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).
- Then there was the widow of Zarephath. She welcomed the prophet Elijah during a drought and, following his instructions, used the last of her flour and oil to prepare a meal for him. As a result, God blessed her and her son, and their food supply did not run out. (1 Kings 17).

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<sup>1</sup> “Open Our Eyes,” Sermon Series, prepared by Discipleship Ministries of the General Board of Discipleship, United Methodist Church, Week 3: Hear All the People, article on internet, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/open-our-eyes>, accessed 20 May 2020.

- And what about the woman of Shunem, who invited the prophet Elisha to stop in for a meal whenever he passed by. She and her husband even provided a room for Elisha to rest in when he was in town. What was this woman's reward? A son for a family who had no son. (2 Kings 4:8-17).

Both the widow of Zarephath and the Shunmanite woman received the prophet's reward Jesus spoke of. Why? Because they welcomed the prophets, and by welcoming them, they welcomed God. Clearly, the result of hospitality is blessing from God. And just as clearly, Jesus indicates hospitality is a two-way street:

“Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones [in other words, to someone just starting out in the faith] in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:41-42)

Normally, we think we're the ones who need to offer the hospitality, that the way to measure how good we are at being hospitable is by the numbers.

- How many people did we welcome this Sunday?
- How many seats did we fill with new faces?

But what if hospitality isn't about numbers at all? What if it is really about **grace given and grace received**? That's harder to measure, but it seems to be what Jesus is saying here.

- He is talking about the hospitality that the disciples receive, and he is talking about the impact of their presence on those they go to meet.
- It's a two-way street...just like love.
- Hospitality, like love, isn't a one-time thing, a one-time experience.
- Hospitality is a way of life, a way of being and living in the world.

Jesus is saying that we will be welcomed if we are a welcoming presence ourselves; that we will transform lives, even if only in small, seemingly insignificant ways, like offering a cup of cold water on a hot day.

The only way we are likely to do that is if we are transformed ourselves. It isn't just our words that bring the grace, beloved—it's our whole being, our whole presence. Notice how Jesus never gives his followers a script to follow, never tells them what to say. “As you proclaim the good news” is as close as he gets to directing them. Once again, maybe this is telling us that the good news is proclaimed as much through our living as through our speaking; as much through our attitudes and the looks on our faces as through whatever words we might say. The saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi comes to mind here:

“Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”

Here's a significant thought: Our lives are preaching the Gospel. The way we live has an impact on other people. They are looking at us and looking to us. Our words have an impact, too; make no mistake about that. We must always be prepared to “give an account of the hope that lives within us.” But the ones Jesus singles out here, the ones who “don't lose their reward” are the givers of cups, not the proclaimers of proverbs.

- The hospitality we receive is related to the hospitality we give.
- The love we give is related to the love we receive.

It's that simple.

We cannot scare people into the arms of God. But we can love them there. We can't force people into the fellowship of the church. But we can welcome them here.

Think about when you were welcomed into a place. Maybe it was a church. Maybe it was this church! Who made you feel welcome? More to the point, how were you made to feel welcome, welcome enough to make the place your church home?

There's one other thing today's lesson tells us about hospitality: Hospitality is not an option; it's not something we just add on to what we are already doing in mission and ministry. Hospitality is central to who we are. It defines us. There's a quote often attributed to the poet Maya Angelou that speaks to what is most important here:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."<sup>2</sup>

Whether she was the one who said this or not, we can recognize the truth of the saying. There is significance in how we welcome and how we are welcomed.

Jesus is telling the disciples that this road of making disciples, sharing the good news, is a difficult one. But through it all, there are blessings to be found along the way. Many times, those blessings are small and simple and may not be noticed right away. But if we open our eyes, open our ears, and open our hearts, we'll begin to experience those treasures of God's kingdom in the here and now.

May it ever be so. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Amanda Macias, "15 Pieces Of Advice From Maya Angelou," Business Insider.com, May 28, 2014, article on internet, <https://www.businessinsider.com/maya-angelou-quotes-2014-5>, accessed 25 Jun 2020.